DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 025 CE 029 018

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TITLE National Strategies for Coping with Unemployment: An International Perspective. Occasional Paper No. 69.
INSTITUTION Ohio State Univ., Columbus. National Center for Research in Vocational Education.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 17p.: Paper presented at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education Staff Development Seminar (Columbus, OH, May 1981).
AVAILABLE FROM National Center Publications, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1960 Kenny Rd., Columbus, OH 43210 ($1.90).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Economic Change; *Economic Climate; Economic Development; Economic Factors; *Education Work Relationship; Employment; *Employment Level; Employment Opportunities; Employment Patterns; *Employment Projections; Employment Statistics; Labor Force Nonparticipants; Labor Market; Training; *Unemployment
IDENTIFIERS *Europe (West); *Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the economics of employment and education in industralized countries, particularly European countries. The paper covers six main topics. The first part deals with the present European employment situation, using figures mainly from Holland; the second part is an economic outlook for the 1980s; in the third, the employment and economic situations are combined, and the resulting employment prospects are considered. Discussed in part 4 are economic policies to cope with unemployment. Labor market policies are the subject of the fifth part, while the last section looks at social and cultural policies and what education can do within an overall packet to cope with the unemployment problem. A question-and-answer section follows. The paper maintains that actual unemployment is worse than the figures would indicate because of the rate of disability retirement; suggestions are made for policies of re-education, economic restructuring, and stimulation of international demand. (KC)

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ED203025

Occasional Paper No. 69

NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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May 1981

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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FOREWORD

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education at The Ohio State University is pleased to present a paper by Dr. Louis Emmerij entitled *National Strategies for Coping with Unemployment: An International Perspective.* This paper was presented at a staff development seminar at the National Center.

Dr. Emmerij is rector of the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague in the Netherlands. He has a rich and interesting background in the fields of employment, training, and developing nations. Born in the Netherlands, he attended the University of Paris, John Hopkins University, and Columbia University, receiving a doctorate from the University of Paris. Dr. Emmerij served at the Institute for Economic and Social Studies in Paris from 1961 to 1962, as director of Scientific Affairs at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) from 1962 to 1970, and also as director of the World Employment Programme at the International Labor Organization (ILO) from 1971 to 1976. In addition to his current assignment as rector of the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague, he is also the president of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes and serves on the Governing Council of the Society for International Development (SID).

Dr. Emmerij has written many articles and books and has lectured throughout the world. In this lecture, he addresses the European employment situation, the economic outlook for the eighties, employment prospects in Europe, proposed economic policies to cope with unemployment, and labor market policies. On behalf of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, I am pleased to share with you this talk by Dr. Louis Emmerij.

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for
Research in Vocational Education

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NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

- The European Employment Situation
- An Economic Outlook for the Eighties
- Employment Prospects in Europe
- Economic Policies to Cope with Unemployment
- Labor Market Policies

I want to discuss the economics of employment and education in industrialized countries. I shall be referring mainly to the European situation; you know the American situation much better, and we can exchange ideas during the discussion period. I shall present my policy package in six parts: the first part will deal with the present European employment situation, using figures mainly from Holland; the second will be an economic outlook for the 1980s; and in the third part I shall put the employment and economic situations together and discuss the resulting employment prospects. I will talk about economic policies with which to cope with unemployment in the fourth part, about labor market policies in the fifth, and about social and cultural policies and what education can do within an overall package to cope with the unemployment problem in the last.

The employment situation today in the Netherlands, which is representative of that in Western and Northern Europe, is quite remarkable: we have "open" unemployment on the one hand, and a "hidden" unemployment problem in many European countries on the other. This dual phenomenon is usually only seen in developing countries.

Around 5 percent of the Dutch labor force is openly unemployed. This figure is somewhat higher in Belgium and in France, and a bit lower in West Germany.

The hidden unemployment problem is an interesting phenomenon. In Holland, people can be declared by doctors as unfit to work due to either physical or psychological reasons, which entail that they receive 80 percent of their most recent salary until they are reinstated by a doctor. Close to 15 percent of the Dutch labor force falls into the "unfit for work" category.

This category has drawn the attention of a great many observers because of its size and because it includes over half of the Dutch labor forces between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-five. It seems rather as though an epidemic has hit the country. Many of these people are healthy, however, and often older workers may be declared medically unfit for the humanitarian reason that they are not able to continue in their present firms or they cannot find new jobs. Estimates show that about one-half, or 7 to 8 percent of this category, is really unemployed in this "hidden" way.

Effectual subsidizing of the "unfit for work" category thus takes the place of unemployment benefits. The 80 percent remuneration is more profitable than unemployment's diminishing returns, which are 80 percent for the first six months, 75 percent for the succeeding two years, and a minimum income after that.

Additionally, 10 percent of the Dutch labor force reports that they are sick each day. This figure, added to the 5 percent open unemployment plus the 15 percent unfit for work, equals about one-third of the Dutch labor force which, at any point in time, is not on the job. It is difficult to decide how representative this figure is for other European countries. It may be somewhat inflated because of the sophisticated social security laws of the Netherlands.

The 5 percent "open" unemployment, coupled with the 7 to 8 percent unemployment hidden in the "unfit for work" category, reveal a real unemployment rate of about 12 percent. I believe that this is not uncommon in Europe.

Added to that (perhaps this is a loose interpretation) is a category of people who can be termed as the "discouraged." These are people, particularly women, who would like to work but do not actively seek employment because they feel for various reasons that they do not have a chance. The total rate of unemployment, roughly defined of course, then jumps to about 15 percent, instead of the official figure of 5 percent. Again, this is true not only of the Netherlands but also of a large portion of Europe.

I now turn to the economic outlook for the 1980s. During the second half of the last decade, there was a slowdown of economic growth for several reasons. First, raw materials and energy became more expensive. Second, the environmental lobby also caused costs to rise. And third, the weight of the industrial sector in overall economic activities in Europe diminished to the advantage of the services sector. Traditionally, the main locomotives of economic growth were found in the manufacturing/industrial sector rather than the services sector. This is a structural explanation for the slowdown of economic growth.

Ten years ago, Europe averaged 5 to 6 percent economic growth each year. Today, the average is 1 to 3 percent, and this year in Holland, it is zero. A decade ago many people in Holland, and in Europe in general, wanted zero growth. Now that they have it, they are worried because the numbers of people in the social security category are increasing; more people must be maintained, with a smaller margin of maneuverability. If we pursue the same policies in the 1980s, therefore, Europe's economic growth will continue to average between zero and 2 or 3 percent.

On the other hand, the increase in labor productivity relative to the rate of economic growth will probably be rather high. Thus, any economic growth will be due to increases in labor productivity rather than the creation of additional jobs. Why? It is due to the microelectronic technological wave, or, in simpler terms, computerization. After close examination, I am convinced that microelectronics will be introduced in all sectors of the economy, including the services sector, by 1985. Traditionally,this sector has been the main reservoir of jobs in Europe.

The difference between this technological wave and previous ones is that the latter had major impact only in certain economic sectors, and therefore the employment that was lost in one sector was created indirectly in others. This does not seem to be the case with the microelectronics revolution, which will affect all sectors of the economy simultaneously. A survey of the present employment situation and of the future economic outlook in terms of the resulting employment prospects does not seem very promising. In the 1980s, the European labor force will continue to grow in spite of diminishing demographic trends. In a country such as the Netherlands, in particular the increased labor force participation rate of women will more than offset the diminishing rate of population growth. Holland has traditionally had a relatively small female labor force; that is changing very rapidly and will continue to do so. Therefore, we shall not only have a large unemployment backlog but also a situation in which large numbers of additional people will be looking for jobs each year. If you put the low rate of economic growth,

which is expected according to present policy trends, together with the relatively high rate of labor productivity increase and the tremendous backlog in unemployment, it can be calculated that a return to the full employment of the early 1970s will not be possible in Europe in the 1980s. Full employment in the old style, defined as working eight hours a day for five days a week for forty-eight or forty-nine weeks a year and forty-five to fifty years in one stretch, does not seem feasible during the 1980s.

To help solve some of these problems, I now turn to my policy package: first, economic policies. I advocate the return to a qualitatively acceptable rate of economic growth of at least 3 to 4 percent in Europe, and especially in Holland. Many people say that this cannot be done, but with the right policy package it should be possible in small, open economies such as those of Europe.

First of all, an active and anticipatory economic restructuring policy is necessary. This means that changes taking place in the world economic structure need to be anticipated by policymakers in individual countries. In Europe, we tend, for employment reasons, to continue with enterprises and factories that are no longer competitive in the world market. Economists, trade unions, and political parties believe that if we restrain salaries and wages, our problems will be over. There is very little discussion, however, about a European industrial package that is geared to the rapidly changing world market.

Japan is a good example of a country that has adjusted to the changing world market; and the so-called newly industrializing countries (NICs) are following suit. They include countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Tomorrow, they may be the Philippines and India. NICs' participation in world industrial exports has increased drastically during the past ten years.

A citizen of a NIC once asked me if I was from a DIC (decadent industrialized country). I took that as a warning.

I would propose that we do not take employment creation as the number one criterion for economic policies. Governments will often subsidize enterprises because they want to save jobs. This is a defensive, and in the medium and long run, a self-defeating policy. Billions of dollars of subsidies are invested in enterprises and factories to delay the inevitable moment of bankruptcy. As a result, the national economic structure becomes more rigid. This type of subsidizing is, or has been, particularly true for economies such as those of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Instead, I propose that the first criterion be maximization of income for the benefit of the community. Sound economic structure does not always go hand-in-hand with full employment in the old style, particularly in small open economies. This proposal may have a negative effect on employment in the short run; however, it will restructure the economy in such a way that its competitive strength is maintained and employment in the medium and long term will benefit.

The second policy I want to discuss is stimulation of international demand. Unemployment and underutilization of capacity sound sadly paradoxical in view of a world where so many countries and people are not able to meet their most basic and essential needs. I, therefore, favor a proposal that has many labels, among them a Worldwide Marshall Plan. Most recently, it has been proposed by the so-called Brandt Report, named after Dr. Willy Brandt, president of the Socialist Party in West Germany. This proposal involves the massive transfer of resources from industrialized countries to certain developing countries. These capital resources will stimulate production in the poorer, rather than the newly industrializing countries (NICs), which do not

need such additional support. As a result of the increased capacity for production in poorer economies and their concentration on meeting their pressing domestic needs, there will be a demand for the exports of the industrialized countries. It is a positive-sum-game proposal in which all parties stand to gain.

Of course, some industrialized countries might think that export demands would be for the products of their floundering enterprises. In other words, it might seem that this proposal could go counter to the economic restructuring plans presented in my first policy statement. However, if developing countries would use a strategy that stresses meeting basic needs as a first priority, the export orders received by the industrialized countries would be quite different from their traditional exports. Therefore, the second economic policy proposal of stimulating international demand should be seen together with the economic restructuring proposals, because the stimulation will increase the need for economic restructuring.

With such policies, the rate of economic growth in Europe might return to 3 to 4 percent, but that would still not be sufficient. Two other policy dimensions, therefore, have to be added—labor market policies and social/cultural policies.

Labor market policies in Europe are restrained by geographical mobility in two ways. The first restraint comes from people in the social security categories discussed earlier. The second restraint is the difficulty, even in a small country like Holland, of moving workers from one place to another, even over a distance of 100 kilometers—a problem that is often related to the housing situation.

Therefore, I would propose three specific measures with which to counteract these restraints. The first deals with moving expenses. Credit should be given for up to one year, or a lump sum equivalent to twelve months unemployment benefits should be provided, rather than a monthly sum for twelve months. This money or credit would motivate and help the person with moving expenses, cushioning the loss, for example, of having to buy or sell a house.

The second measure is something quite new for Europe. It involves giving vouchers to employers who are willing to employ people who are medically unfit for work (i.e., handicapped or disabled). Although, as previously mentioned, estimates show that one half of the people in the "unfit for work" category are really healthy, the other half are genuinely ill or unfit for work. The latter would be subsidized to a certain extent by this program, and participating employers would be given the opportunity to pay fewer social security premiums to the government.

A third measure, a much debated issue in the United States, deals with the question of minimum wages for youth. In Europe this subject is practically taboo. Only in recent months have I noted timid attempts at discussing the validity and the wisdom of relatively high minimum wages for young workers. An interesting aspect of this question is the differences between young people who are able to continue their education and their peers who do not have that opportunity and are working in the labor market. In most European countries, university students, or postsecondary students, are heavily subsidized by the community. In my country, for example, unlike the United States where university tuition fees are considerable, tuition costs only about $250 a year, regardless of the university. In the case of high minimum wages, employers want to get maximum returns from their young workers. The money spent on high wages makes them reluctant to allow these young workers time off for additional training and education. During the years when young workers might be going to school, they may be held back by resistance on the part of their employer. Instead of looking at lifetime earnings, trade unions look at short-term benefits.

A fourth measure involves intervention on the supply side of the labor market, and relates to social and cultural policies. This intervention is necessary because, for example, each year in a country like Holland we pay tens of billions of dollars to the unemployed and the "unfit to work." This is a fantastically expensive way of expelling people from the labor market. It is also bad for the individual's ego and the economy. Yet these people need a decent level of income. My proposal amounts to trying to achieve the same results—fewer people in the labor market—in a more equitable fashion.

Many proposals have been made for intervening on the supply side of the labor market in Europe. They range from shortening the work week to thirty-five hours, to shortening the work day to five hours, to getting people out of the labor market more quickly: many people who still feel fit are being asked to retire earlier. Other proposals involve keeping people in the educational system longer, using the school as a parking place.

These measures have two things in common. First, they do not really solve the problem of unemployment; and second, they are rather dictatorial in forcing people, for example, to work shorter hours.

The type of policy intervention I propose allows people to withdraw temporarily and voluntarily from the labor force in order to return to school. It is called paid educational leave. This way, they can train for other jobs or obtain additional education, training, and skills. Instead of paying tens of billions of dollars a year to expel some 500,000 people who are unwillingly ejected from the work force, we should spend the same amount on an ever-rotating group of people who will be able to further their education. This deals with the problem in a more equitable and psychologically beneficial fashion.

Paid educational leave is related to a system of recurrent education, which I strongly favor. The system is composed of two parts, an initial period which is taken early in life, and a recurrent period which is taken later, if and when the person desires. The United States already has a very flexible educational system. European educational systems are much more rigid, however, and recurrent education is a relatively new idea. It is still assumed that all people are motivated to gain education at the same periods of their lives, despite the fact that social science has proven otherwise. I therefore propose, in my capacity as chairman of the Dutch Committee on Paid Educational Leave, that a system of paid educational leave be introduced, which will enable the idea of recurrent education to be changed from slogan to reality. Without this policy as instrument, there will be no large-scale attempt to introduce recurrent education.

Paid educational leave and recurrent education will meet many objectives. First, they will enhance and stimulate equal educational opportunity and give people a second, third, or fourth chance to return to school. Second, they will enhance the flexibility of the labor market. People will have more occupational and financial opportunities. Third, they will help to achieve a *new style* of full employment by letting people withdraw voluntarily and temporarily in order to improve or change their skills, instead of being expelled into unemployment.

I have tried to show how, through economic restructuring and stimulation of international demand combined with labor-market and educational leave measures, low economic growth and unemployment can be overcome. By restructuring the economy out of recession and by structuring the opportunities of individuals, we can hope to turn a difficult situation around.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Question: Could you summarize the benefits of paid educational leave?

European countries pay an enormous amount of money each year to keep people out of the labor market. What I propose is to use the same amount of money to give people an opportunity to return to school. It can be for either general or vocational education. Not only are people given the opportunity to broaden their education, but they can be retrained in line with changes taking place in the economy and in the labor market. The labor market therefore becomes more flexible, and the money is spent more productively both in terms of the person's psychological well-being and in terms of economics. Is this not an improvement over spending an important percentage of the public budget for the purely negative reason of keeping people out of the labor market, which leaves them with nothing to do?

Question: Does this or a similar proposal exist anywhere in Europe?

Let me give you the example of Sweden, which has relatively low unemployment. The reason for this is that, for many years, Sweden has had an active manpower policy through which a considerable amount of vocational training and retraining has been effected; an average 3 to 4 percent of the Swedish labor force is always being retrained. Some people may say that Sweden's low unemployment figure is dishonest because of the people being retrained, and that the percentage should be added to the open unemployment figure. I take issue with that statement. Retraining the labor force is an *investment*, not unemployment.

Question: How well equipped do you think the educational system is to take on this task? How well will employers accept it?

European and Dutch demographic trends show that unemployment of primary and secondary school teachers is increasing due to a drop in population growth. More and more schools are standing empty. From the point of view of insufficiently utilized capacity, therefore, the answer to your question is an unqualified yes. The system is capable of taking on the task. The demographic situation would be used to maximum advantage. Additionally, the teachers themselves will need retraining. Paid educational leave should probably start with them. For example, teaching young children is quite different from teaching adults.

European employers are rather conservative, and like trade unions, are suspicious of new concepts. They are afraid that their on-the-job vocational training will be jeopardized. However, they are trying to sell their own programs to the government. In this sense they support vocational training efforts and indirectly favor my proposal.

Question: Will there by any extra revenue from social security to pay for this education? How will you get people to participate, and what kind of people will you use in the initial program?

As I mentioned during the presentation, there will be no additional outlay. Instead of paying people 75 to 80 percent of their income by expelling them from the labor market, I propose that they be paid the same 75 to 80 percent to give them the opportunity to withdraw through paid educational leave. No extra money is spent. On the educational side, the additional outlays can be minimized because of the peculiar demographic situation.

Now, where shall I get my first group of volunteers for such a program? I will need 300,000 to 400,000 people willing to leave their jobs for paid educational leave. There is evidence that this will not be too difficult. In the Netherlands, for example, secondary schools for adults started spontaneously from night classes, i.e., evening schools turned into day schools. The number of people, both women and unemployed, who participated surpassed all expectations.

Initially, I want to use positive discrimination; I want that first group to consist of lower income, less educated people. In the normal course of events, the people who take first advantage of additional facilities are the better educated, with higher incomes. Unfortunately, this is how social measures that are progressive turn against themselves and widen income gaps and opportunities. Although this low income, less educated group may have difficulty in accepting the program, special efforts will be made to explain it to them. Additionally, once people who are at present unemployed or unfit for work have been retrained, then they can easily replace those members of the labor force that decide to take educational leave.

Question: How would you stimulate international demand?

My proposal parallels the Brandt Committee Report. There would be a group of donor countries, such as the countries participating in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on the one hand, and a group of developing countries on the other hand. Capital would be transferred, but much of it would come back in the shape of export orders. The plan is a straightforward transfer of financial resources to indebted countries. It is also a way to stimulate our own economies through use of our exports. It would be a much simpler scheme than the very detailed way of approving a whole series of projects, which is often done in the United States bureaucracy. This plan may make people hesitate because they see the initial expense. They do not realize that most of it will come back to them through the stimulation of their own economy.

Question: How will paid educational leave affect workers' attitudes?

Ten percent of the labor force reports that they are sick each morning for physical or psychological reasons. A proportion of these people are unhappy with their work environment. For others, their present opportunities do not live up to their expectations. The latter is a phenomenon we have noticed in many European countries over the last ten to fifteen years. Paid educational leave will not result in satisfaction with the working environment, but it will make people feel more motivated.

If you give them the opportunity to do different things, to pursue their goals, then surely they will feel more comfortable at the work place. Other experiments in self-management that allow participation in the decision-making process have helped people to adjust better to their jobs.

Question: If you were called upon to advise the new administration on improving employment training practices in the United States, what kind of policy and structural recommendations would you have?

Although I am not totally familiar with the situation in the United States, I can give some comparisons with Europe. Economic restructuring in the United States seems more anticipatory, with little government intervention.

Education in the United States is also much more flexible, with people moving more easily in and out of the educational system. But the walls between the school period, the work period, and the retirement period should be removed. The sequential idea of a life divided into three rigid parts, school/work/retirement, should be done away with. People should be able to overlap these periods. For example, individuals should be able to retire at any age for two years of paid educational leave, instead of waiting until they are too old to utilize it. Surely the United States would adapt more easily to such a system. I would emphasize redefining full employment through paid educational leave. Additionally, I would put less stress on economic restructuring and more emphasis on United States participation in the stimulation of international demand.

Question: What type of rehabilitation system does the Netherlands have for people who want to work but are classified as unfit? Is that part of the billions spent on unemployment?

I am not familiar with the rehabilitation program and am not quite sure how the money is spent. I would like to reemphasize the proposal of giving vouchers to employers as an incentive to hire disabled persons.

Question: Would you want to limit the length of time a person can spend in the educational program before returning to work?

It should be a considerable period—at least six months. Experiments with paid educational leave in Italy and France only involve a few hours a week or a few days a month. Although a maximum period has not been set by the Dutch Committee on Paid Educational Leave, a minimum of about six months is required to stimulate employers to replace the person leaving. An employer would not be interested in replacing someone who disappears for a few hours a week or two to three days a month. Nothing would change. If, however, a person leaves for a longer period, it is better for that individual's educational opportunities, and would meet the objective of full employment in the new style.

Question: What are the trends in the education of youth? How do they compare with those of older workers?

The same phenomenon can be seen in all countries. The average number of years of education in the younger age groups is much higher than for the average population. This has changed somewhat in recent years, a result of differences in salary structures. The salary differential is no longer as large between people with a university education and those with a secondary technical education. As a result, and due to the duration of university studies, the younger generations in Holland and especially in Sweden, are becoming much more cautious about continuing their education. On the average, however, the younger age groups are still much better educated than the older ones. A large number of people in the older age group in Holland have had very little education.

Question: Do you think that the implementation of educational leave would promote richer life experiences and improve the quality of work? Do you think it would make students less tolerant of shoddy instructors?

Studies have been made of World War II veterans who returned to the educational system under the GI Bill. They show that these people were better students, completed their work in a shorter period of time and, indeed, had an impact on what was being taught because they did not take everything for granted. That pattern is now being repeated in Europe in the "open schools" and open universities for older people. This impact on the content of education is not necessarily positive; however, it depends upon the kind of framework in which it is being conducted. If the system is too tolerant, the quality of education becomes diluted until practically nothing remains. The middle of the road is the best course.

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